PATTERNS OF INTERACTION IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Conversation analysis have been used to reveal the nature of interaction in foreign language classrooms. It was found that three types of interaction could be found in an EFL setting. They are as follows: Native speakers-Native speakers (NS-NS), Native speakers-non-native speakers (NS-NNS) and non-native speakers-non-native speakers (NNS-NNS). Different studies have been done regarding the effectiveness of each type of interaction. It was found that while NNS-NNS interactions can produce quantitative and qualitative input, output, and feedback, NS-NNS interactions are to be sought after and more highly desired.

Keywords: Patterns of interaction, NNS-NNS, NS-NNS

Introduction

Classroom interaction is a form of institutional talk which is locally managed but cooperatively constructed speech exchange system (Markee & Kasper, 2004). Composed of interactions between teacher and students and among students, classroom interaction is one of the platforms where any reality about classroom phenomena is produced and can be observed at the same time. The role of interaction in second language learning has been emphasized in the field of SLA. The study of interaction in classrooms ranges from foreigner talk to the study of NNS in interaction and to the study of patterns of interaction in classrooms.

Classrooms’ patterns of interaction

Lightbown and Spada (1999) elaborates three types of modified interaction that facilitate the creation of comprehensible input: 1) comprehension checks—where the native speaker (NS) makes sure that the non-native speaker (NNS) understood, 2) clarification requests—where the NNS ask the NS to clarify, and 3) self-repetition or paraphrase—the native speaker or the non-native speaker repeat their sentences either partially or in their totality. In addition to this classification, Long (1983) considers some other conversational modifications including:

1) *Here-and-now topics* - topics limited to the immediate environment, or to experiences the native speaker imagines the non-native speaker has had.

   NS: Did you prepare this by yourself?

2) *Expansions* - native speakers reacts to non-native speakers’ errors by correcting and expanding what they have just said.

   NNS: I have read it already yesterday
NS: Oh yeah, of course you read it yesterday

3) **Topic-initiating moves** - more abrupt and unintentional topic shifts are accepted when native speakers interact with non-native speakers. (It seems that this is due to the fact that even if interlocutors may want to understand each other, they do not always have the time or motivation to work toward this goal.

- NNS: I arrived here first this morning
- NS: Can you show me your work?
- Shorter responses - high frequency of yes-no responses

Furthermore, Long (1983, p. 218-219) considers other linguistic adjustments typical of NS/NNS interactions including the following:

- **Phonological**: slower paced speech; more use of stress; pauses; more clearly enunciated; avoidance of contractions
- **Morphology and Syntax**: more well-formed utterances; shorter utterances; less complex utterances; few ‘wh’ questions
- **Semantics**: fewer idiomatic expressions, high average lexical frequency of nouns and verbs.

Long (1996, p. 415) claims that such modified input is evident in first language acquisition in the form of “motherese” and is realized in SLA by NSs using “simplified codes” such as foreigner talk, child language, pidgins, early second language (L2) forms, telegraphese, and so forth.

Long (1980) performed a discourse analysis of dialogue transcripts of dyads made up of native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS). Long found there was much more interaction between NS-NNS dyads than between NS-NS dyads, and concluded that increased interaction was due to misunderstandings between language partners and subsequent linguistic negotiations and modifications in order to resolve misunderstandings. Based on the findings, he extracted six generalizations:

- First, linguistic simplification tends to increase comprehension; however, simple sentences alone are not always helpful and may even hinder.
- Second, simplification and elaboration often co-occur, but simplification is not necessarily superior to elaboration.
- Third, comprehension is consistently improved by interactional modifications and a combination of simplification and elaboration.
- Fourth, modifications appear to be of more use to NNSs of lower L2 proficiency.
- Fifth, isolated input or interactional adjustments are not sufficient for improving comprehensibility of whole texts.
- Sixth, NNSs indicate a more favorable perception of their own comprehension when they have been exposed to modified speech.
Doughty and Long (2003) have cited, Long’s (1996) interaction hypothesis as negotiation for meaning triggers interactional adjustments by the NS, facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities and output in production ways. Interaction hypothesis emphasizes on the role of negotiated interaction in language development. According to Gass and Torres (2005) during negotiation works, the learner’s attention is directed to:

1) The discrepancy between what s/he knows about L2 and what the L2 really is and

2) The areas of L2 which he doesn’t have information. In this case, negotiation is the initial step to learning and it is one part of interaction.

Lightbown and Spada (1999) maintain that interaction hypothesis says that interaction is essential condition for SLA, through which speakers modify their speech and interaction patterns to help learners participate in a conversation. Ellis (1997) refers to interaction hypothesis as the conversational exchanges that arise when interlocutors seek to prevent a communicative breakdown or to remedy an actual communication stop that has arisen. He believes that acquisition is promoted when the input to which learners are exposed is made comprehensible through the interactional modifications that arise when meaning is negotiated.

**NS-NNS vs. NNS-NNS interaction quality and quantity comparisons**

Many second language teachers and researchers believe that, while NS-NNS classroom interaction is more productive, NNS-NNS interaction plays an important role as well in the learning process. Reviews, such as the one conducted by Long and Porter (1985), of studies comparing these two types of interaction have found consistent evidence of comparably higher production of input in NNS-NNS interactions.

Varonis and Gass (1985) suggest the importance of NNS-NNS interactions in its allowance of greater opportunity for negotiation of meaning than either NS-NNS or NS-NS interactions. They propose that negotiation, moreover, is especially important in obtaining input necessary for second language acquisition to occur. In their study, they attempted to both "depart from and build upon" previous research investigating NS-NNS interactions, through a consideration of the nature of interactions between NNS-NNSs (p. 71). Results of the study indicated that NNS-NNS interactions involve more negotiation in terms of time than NS-NNS or NS-NS interactions, and that the negotiation itself requires far more work for resolution of meaning to take place. Furthermore, according to Varonis and Gass, "this negotiation serves the function of providing the participants with a greater amount of comprehensible input" (p. 84). At the very least, results of this study indicate a quantitative difference in the amount of modified input between NS-NNS and NNS-NNS interactions.

Holliday (1993 as cited in Hall& Verplaetse, 2009), however, suggests that the validity of NNS-NNS pairwork as a source for input leading to acquisition of L2 forms is questionable. His study questioned whether NNSs could supply each other with modified input about the grammatical forms of an L2 while practicing typical communicative language teaching pairwork tasks. Holliday found that NNS-NNS interactions contain few grammatically correct, targetlike cues for potential L2 syntactic acquisition.
The results confirmed that NNS-NNS pairwork does not tend to provide sufficient, target-like input about the L2 syntax. "A comparison of the spoken interaction of NS-NNS and NNS-NNS dyads...reveals that NNSs do not overall supply a great percentage of grammatical or target-like cues" (p.5). The results of Holliday's study also implied a lack of effectiveness on the part of NNS-NNS ESL pairwork for primary provision of target-like L2 syntactic forms. This study contradicted an earlier study done by Gass and Varonis (1989) that claimed that NNS modifications are target-like in their direction. However, Holliday predicted and confirmed that if these modifications are not actually target-like, claims that learners are being given grammatical, target-like input about the L2 syntax are invalid.

Gass and Varonis Results of the study suggest that while receiving modified input may temporarily help NNSs with comprehension, it may also deter subsequent L2 output. It was shown that NNSs produced fewer errors of comprehension when modified input, rather than unmodified input, and interaction were allowed. Additionally, interaction between Ns-NNSs in Trial 1 was shown to assist NNSs L2 output in Trial 2. Gass and Varonis argue that "the results of interaction are not necessarily immediate," and that "this study shows the potential effect of interaction (Italics in the original)" rather than any exactly specified effect upon L2 acquisition of forms (p. 300).

In their study of how language learners' interactions address the input, output, and feedback needs of L2 learners, Pica, et al (1996) found that although NNS-NNS interaction addresses some of these needs, it does not provide the same quantity and quality of modified input and feedback as NS-NNS interaction does.

Pica et al., (1996), The results showed that while NNS-NNS interaction does not provide the same quantity and quality of modified input, in terms of conformity to L2 target-like syntax, as NS-NNS interaction, NNS-NSs interactions can provide comparable quantity and quality of modified output. Furthermore, Pica et al. assert that the quantity and quality of feedback provided by NNSs through negotiation signals represented the strongest contribution to learners' needs.

According to Pica et al., results revealed that for L2 learning, learners "can be a limited source of modified input and modified output and can provide opportunities for feedback, albeit in a simplified form" (p. 79).

Pica (1996) claims that though negotiation appears to give NNSs data on possible L2 forms, it does little to assist in terms of supplying all of a NNSs needs for negative evidence on their own interlanguage forms. She focused her study on the question of how NS-NNS negotiation affects L2 acquisition, especially in regard to "the amount and type of data on L2 lexical and structural features that are made available" (p. 14). Pica found, in her analysis of NS-NNS negotiations, that NS cues and feedback did indeed provide NNSs with copious amounts of L2 lexical and structural data.

According to results of Varonis and Gass' (1985) study, NNS-NNS interactions provide more modified, comprehensible input than NS-NNS interactions. And, in terms of modified output, results of the study by Pica et al. (1996) suggest that NNSs exhibit modified output quantitatively and qualitatively comparable to that of NSs. Additionally, regarding feedback, Pica et al.'s study shows that NNSs feedback remains one of the strongest areas in which learners can assist each other in L2 acquisition. As evidenced
in the studies by Holliday (1993 as cited in Hall, & Verplaetse, 2009) and Pica et al. (1996), however, NNSs modified input is not of the same quality and quantity as that of NSs. Overall results of these studies, in my opinion, seem to show that the quality of NNS-NNS interaction, especially in terms of NNS modified input, generally does not completely measure up to those of NSs. Yet, as Holliday (1993 as cited in Hall, & Verplaetse, 2009) points out, “cues in the input of NSs have not yet been shown to enhance the acquisition of natural languages…” (p. 5). Researchers are still confused as to whether even input cues (cross-sentential cues about the L2 syntax, for example) from NSs lead to acquisition.

For illustration of this point, results of Pica’s (1996) study show that while NSs cues and feedback provide NNSs with generous amounts of L2 lexical and structural data, salient cues directing NNSs attention to their non-targetlike interlanguage forms are seldom generated. Furthermore, while Varonis and Gass’ (1985) study indicated that negotiations between NNSs provide great amounts of comprehensible input, Gass and Varonis’s (1994) study claimed that not only is comprehensible input not sufficient for L2 acquisition to occur, but that only NS-NNS interactions effect subsequent NNS L2 output. Therefore, although it has been shown that NNSs do produce some valuable input, output, and feedback in their interactions with one another, it cannot be said with any degree of certainty that these interactions are sufficient for L2 acquisition to occur.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of these studies, second language teachers must incorporate into their classrooms the understanding that while NNS-NNS interactions can produce quantitative and qualitative input, output, and feedback, NS-NNS interactions are to be sought after and more highly desired. Teachers should utilize NNS-NNS pairwork and groupwork in situations in which NSs are not readily available, but must avoid any form of over-reliance upon them. Teachers must also strive to provide salient cues for learners to notice their use of non-target like interlanguage forms. Additionally, second language teachers need to push their students to continually strive for comprehensibility in their input, output, and feedback.

REFERENCES


